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ABSTRACT

In attempting to understand their own behaviors and that of others, people make different attributions about causes. During the process of supervision, supervisors and counselor trainees make many attributions, including those about client, trainee, and supervisor behavior. A supervision analogue was used to examine attributional processes in counselor supervision. Specifically, differences between counselor trainees and supervisors and changes during the supervision process were hypothesized. Confederate clients (N=16) who were college students, counselor trainees (N=13) who were master's degree students, and supervisors (N=9) who were advanced level counseling psychology doctoral students participated in the study. Results failed to confirm previous findings of differences between trainees and supervisors, but did show significant changes over time for both parties on the attributional measures of locus, stability, and controllability of causality. Counselor trainees were seen more as the locus of causality, and the causes for the events in the analogue counseling sessions were seen as more stable and controllable as supervision progressed. Approaching supervision from an attributional perspective holds promise for understanding the supervision process. Previous research has documented differences in attributions between supervisors and trainees, and this study demonstrated changes in supervision that occur over time. (Author/ABL)

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Attributions of Counseling by Counselor Trainees and Supervisors Over Time

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Abstract

A supervision analogue was used to examine attributional processes in counselor supervision. Specifically, differences between counselor trainees and supervisors and changes during the supervision process were hypothesized. Results failed to confirm previous findings of differences (cf. actor-observer differences) between trainees and supervisors, but did show significant ($p < .05$) changes over time for both parties on the attributional measures of locus, stability, and controllability of causality. Counselor trainees were seen as more the locus of causality, and the causes for the events in the analogue counseling sessions were seen as more stable and controllable as supervision progressed.

Attributions of Counseling by Counselor Trainees and Supervisors Over time

In attempting to understand their own behaviors and that of others, people make different attributions about causes (Kelly & Michela, 1980). During the process of supervision, supervisors and counselor trainees make many attributions, including attributions about client, trainee, and supervisor behavior. Sternitzke, Dixon, and Ponterotto (1988) proposed a conceptual bridge between the attributional literature and counseling supervision, but to this date only one empirical article has directly examined attributional issues in counselor supervision (Dixon & Kruczek, 1990).

Dixon and Kruczek (1990) found that the supervisory situation did reflect the fundamental attribution error between trainee and supervisor (actor-observer). They found that more dispositional attributions were made by the supervisor and more situational attributions by the counselor trainees for the same counseling sequences.

To further validate the relevance of an attribution approach to counselor supervision, we examined the changes in causal attributions in supervision over time. It was hypothesized that there would be differences between the attributions of supervisors and trainees and that attributions would change over time.

Method

Participants

Sixteen confederate clients, thirteen counselor trainees, and nine supervisors participated in the investigation. The confederate clients were recruited from upper level classes in interpersonal relations. Counselor

trainees were master's degree students in counseling who were enrolled in their first or second required practicum. Supervisors were advanced-level doctoral students in Counseling Psychology who either had completed or were enrolled in a course in supervision with an experiential component. These supervisor-trainee dyads normally met weekly for supervision throughout the semester.

Instruments

The Causal Dimension Scale (CDS) was developed by Russell (1982) to assess causal perceptions based on Weiner's dimensions (1979). These dimensions are perceived locus of causality, stability, and controllability. Internal consistency reliabilities for the dimensions were locus ($r = .79$), stability ($r = .86$), and controllability ($r = .51$) (Russell, McAuley, & Tarico, 1987). Multitrait - multimethod analysis supported the convergent-divergent construct validity for these dimensions.

Procedures

Confederate clients were trained by the researchers prior to the counseling analogue interview. Immediately prior to the interview, the counselor trainees were given an intake sheet which included this presenting problem: "This client (name given) is referred following a decline in academic performance. This client is complaining of feeling apathetic and unmotivated with subsequent feelings of guilt, anxiety, and mild depression. This student is requesting counseling in an attempt to eliminate school-related deficits." Additional, factual demographic information (e.g. age, sex, year in school, major, marital status) was given about each confederate client.

The interview between trainee and client was videotaped and lasted about 11 minutes. After the taping, each trainee and his/her supervisor separately viewed the entire tape. At the end of viewing, they both completed the Causal Dimension Scale and a Self-Analysis and Feedback Sheet. The Self-Analysis and Feedback Sheet included 10 items related to counseling skills and an overall assessment of the positive and negative aspects of the interview. Information from these sheets was exchanged at the regularly scheduled supervision sessions for the trainee-supervisor dyads.

This same procedure was implemented early in the semester and at a point at the end of the semester for all trainee-supervisor dyads. Counselor trainees saw a different confederate client at the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester.

Results

Two (Supervisor, Trainee) x Two (Time 1, Time 2) repeated measure analyses of variance were calculated for the three subscale scores of the CDS. Means and standard deviations are reported in Table 1.

For <u>locus</u> of causality, the interaction effect (status by time) was not significant, although nearly so ($p = .08$). The main effect for status was non-significant ($p = .13$) and the main effect for time was significant ($F_{(1,24)} = 8.05$, $p = .01$). Counselor trainees were seen as more the locus of causality for the counseling interaction at the end of the semester than at the beginning. This was particularly so for the supervisors.

For stability, the interaction effect and main effect for status were both non-significant ($p = .22$, $p = .32$ respectively). However, the main effect for time was significant ($F_{(1,24)} = 7.69$, $p = .01$), with more stable attributions at the end of the semester than at the beginning.

For controllability, the interaction effect was non-significant ($p = .76$), as was the main effect for status ($p = .08$), although the latter was nearly significant, with supervisors rating the interaction as more controllable. The main effect for time was significant ($F_{(1,24)} = 4.69$, $p = .04$), with interviews at the end of the semester being seen as more controllable than those at the beginning of the semester.

Discussion

The most apparent result is that both supervisors and counselor trainees change their attributions as trainees progress through a practicum. Trainees are seen more as the locus of causality, and counseling interactions are attributed to more stable, controllable causes at the end of the semester than at the beginning.

These findings are consistent with the position of Jellison and Green (1981). They suggest that western society emphasizes a strong belief in personal responsibility. Internally caused outcomes appear more valued than external ones. Also, internally caused outcomes are often seen as synonymous with competence, growth, and professional maturity in most developmental models of supervision (e.g. Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1980). This is evidenced when trainees move from an insecure falling back on external attributions for success and failure to a willingness to see personal influence in the counseling process whether positive or negative.

The increase in internal, stable, and controllable causal attributions over time for both the trainee and counselor may also result from the increase in skill level typically experienced in beginning practica. This is consistent with the pattern of making internal attributions for success and more external attributions for failure (Kelley & Michela, 1980). As trainees develop more mastery and resulting self-efficacy perceptions, they make more internal, stable, and controlling attributions. Also, as training progresses, supervisors hold trainees more accountable for counseling outcomes.

Although this study failed to find significant actor-observer differences in causal attributions between trainees and supervisors, the trends in the hypothesized direction support continued research. In nearly each instance, ratings by trainees and supervisors were as hypothesized, and on locus and controllability these differences were nearly significant.

Approaching supervision from an attributional perspective holds promise for understanding the supervision process. Previous research has documented differences in attributions between supervisors and trainees (Dixon & Kruczek, 1990), and this study demonstrated changes in supervision that occur over time.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviation for Locus, Stability and Controllability Over Time and Status

	Time			
	Time 1		Time 2	
Status				
Supervisor				
	Mean	(S.D.)	Mean	(S.D.)
Locus	16.38	(6.34)	22.39	(2.47)
Stability	9.92	(4.13)	13.85	(4.74)
Controllability	19.08	(3.38)	20.92	(2.87)
Trainees				
Locus	16.85	(4.10)	18.15	(4.20)
Stability	9.85	(3.80)	11.31	(3.66)
Controllability	17.23	(3.24)	19.69	(3.73)